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## **Shaking a Baby Can Be Deadly**

*New State Web Page Dedicated to Education, Prevention and Help*

**Richmond** – The Virginia Department of Social Services' (VDSS) Child Protective Services reported 45 founded cases involving children in the Commonwealth who died as a result of being violently shaken from 2001 to 2009.

Shaken Baby Syndrome, more recently known as Abusive Head Trauma, is a serious condition that can be fatal or leave devastating permanent injuries. A new [Web page](#) on the VDSS website offers information and assistance to parents and those who care for children.

“Our goal is prevention through education,” said VDSS Commissioner Martin Brown. “It’s critical that parents and caretakers understand just how much damage can result from shaking an infant and toddler. Likewise, we’re providing practical suggestions for recognizing and diffusing the stressors that put children and caretakers at risk.”

The new Web page provides information on what can happen to a child when shaken, and offers an easy-to-download [brochure](#) with tips for soothing a crying child, phone numbers to call for help, and ways to reduce parental frustration.

“Research has identified crying as the number one trigger for shaking a baby or young child,” explained VDSS Director of Family Services Paul McWhinney. “Parents and caregivers don’t plan to do it. It can happen in an instant in a rash moment of stress, anger or agitation. The webpage offers resources and suggestions for coping with these stressors,” McWhinney said. Other common triggers include what the adult perceives as misbehavior and activities like toilet training or feeding.

Because of babies’ weak neck muscles and large head-to-body ratio, violent or sustained shaking can cause:

- Seizures
- Partial or total blindness
- Learning and physical disabilities
- Hearing and speech impairments
- Cognitive disabilities
- Cerebral palsy
- Behavior disorders
- Decreased level of consciousness and vomiting
- Cessation of breathing and heartbeat

- Extreme irritability
- Limp arms and legs
- Death

[House Bill 411](#) was passed in this year's General Assembly session, signed in to law by Governor Bob McDonnell and went into effect July 1. The law not only provides for the online information on the new webpage, but also calls for the distribution and availability of such information to foster and adoptive parents and the staffs of child day programs and children's residential facilities.

"We want parents and caregivers to have more than information on what Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma is. We give them resources. We encourage them to make a plan in advance as to what they will do when tensions run high. Call a friend. Walk away for a few minutes after ensuring the baby is safe and secure. Take deep breaths. These are simple solutions, but they can save a child's life. Remember, it's more important to stay calm than to stop the crying," McWhinney said.

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